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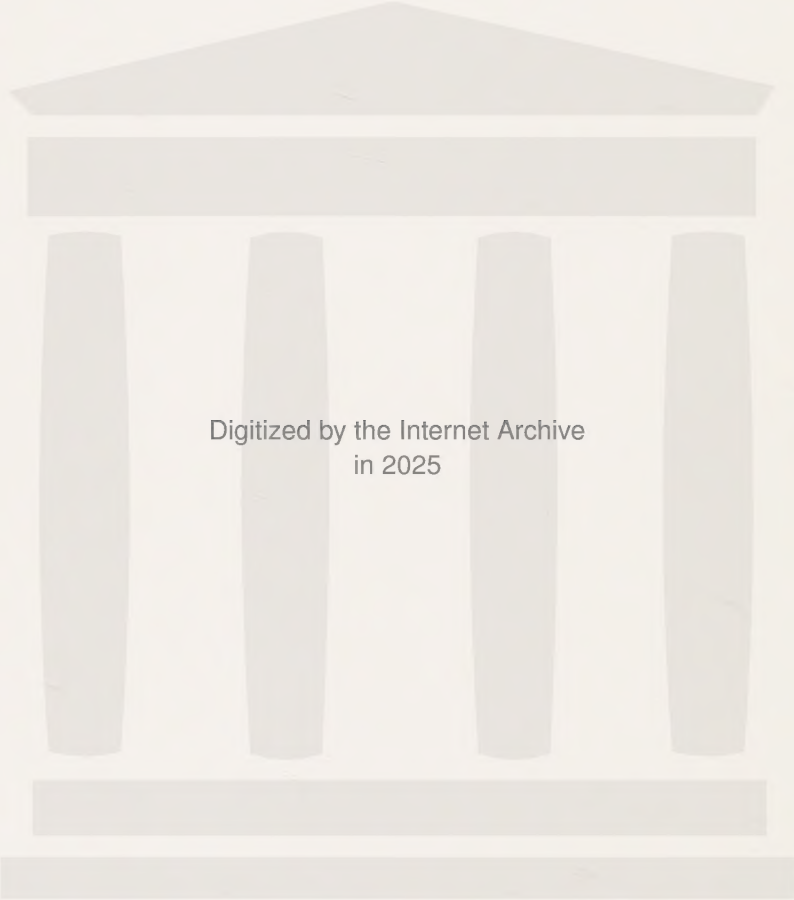
PUBLICATIONS OF THE CATHOLIC
HOMILETIC SOCIETY: NUMBER THREE

PROCEEDINGS OF

The Catholic Homiletic Society

THIRD ANNUAL CONVENTION

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS DEC. 28-30, 1960



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Contents

OFFICERS AND DIRECTORS	4
THE THIRD ANNUAL CONVENTION	5
PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS	8
Teaching Sermon Delivery	
REV. PIUS LEABEL, C.P.	13
The Moral Obligation of Preaching	
REV. PAUL M. BOYLE, C.P., S.T.L., J.C.L.	23
The Psychology of Audience Reaction: Personal Change Through Sermons	
REV. CHARLES A. CURRAN, PH.D.	33
Resolutions Committee	46
Necrology	47

The Catholic Homiletic Society

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The Third Annual Convention of The Catholic Homiletic Society

We began the Third Annual Convention of the Catholic Homiletic Society with the prediction that it would be the best we ever had. We convened in a fine hotel, the Sheraton Towers in Chicago, on December 28, 1960. The rooms were spacious and newly decorated. We had fine facilities for the saying of Mass right in the hotel. The Vicar General of the Archdiocese of Chicago graciously granted us that permission and the Catholic Church Extension Society's President, Archbishop O'Brien, extended his well-known helping hand by allowing us to use twenty portable altars. The Quigley Preparatory Seminary seminarians served the Masses every morning.

Your President's prediction, "the best we ever had," was soon shaken. Our Vice President, the Rev. Anthony Botti, S.J. of St. Andrew on Hudson, Poughkeepsie, N.Y., who was to have been the presiding Chairman, sent word he was confined to the hospital. Our Secretary, the Rev. John P. O'Donnell, of Quigley Preparatory Seminary, Chicago, was taken to the hospital two days before the Convention opened, and our Sub-Chairman, the Rev. Warren McCarthy, also of Quigley Preparatory Seminary, was another hospital patient. The President was forced to play the double role of President and Chairman. To complete the "debacle" one of our outstanding speakers was snow-bound in Hartford, Connecticut!

The Third Annual Convention was the best we ever had! That is the way it turned out right from the beginning! We were honored by the presence of His Eminence Albert Cardinal Meyer of Chicago, who welcomed all the delegates in his usual warm, personal way. At the luncheon His Excellency, Archbishop William Cousins, D.D., of Milwaukee, gave us a most inspiring keynote address.

The President's prophecy came true with the very first paper to be de-

livered after the Presidential Address. He introduced the Rev. Charles Curran, Ph.D., of Loyola University, Chicago, as the man most fitted to address us on the subject, "Audience Analysis with reference to Preaching." Father Curran, Professor of Psychology at Loyola University, formerly Professor of Psychology at Louvain University, Belgium, and permanent Professor of Psychology at the Menninger Institute, delivered his paper entitled, "The Psychology of Audience Reaction: Personal Change through Sermons," and had the audience on its feet at the end giving a standing ovation to him! The consensus was Father Curran's paper was an outstanding contribution to Homiletic literature.

That evening the Special Interest Groups, i.e., the Retreat and Mission Group, the Major Seminary Group, the Minor Seminary Group, and the Pastoral Year men all met that evening to discuss the Curran paper with reference to their own fields.

Father Pius Leabel, C.P., of Mater Dolorosa Seminary, Sierra Madre, California, expressed fear at having to follow Father Curran's magnificent performance. His fears were groundless. His paper "Teaching the Delivery of a Sermon" was illustrated by his own professional moving pictures of his students in "before" and "after" performances. The paper and moving pictures not only proved Father Leabel's skill at teaching delivery in sermons but also demonstrated his excellence in delivery and effectiveness in speech before a convention.

The moral obligation of preaching may have seemed to many an overworked subject, but the paper, "The Moral Obligation of Preaching," delivered by the Rev. Paul M. Boyle, C.P., of Sacred Heart, Louisville, Ky., not only gave much food for thought on the high office of the preacher of the Word but also started very lively discussions and earned the speaker an ovation.

Our bitter disappointment at receiving the news from Hartford, Conn., that Father Walter Burghardt, S.J., Professor of Patristic Theology at Woodstock College, Maryland, and Managing Editor of "Theological Studies," was snow-bound and unable to arrive on time we were forced to conceal. Father Burghardt was to have delivered a major paper on "From Classroom to Pulpit: How Preach Dogma?" In a consultation with the Board of Directors the President was overjoyed to hear that our "Founding Father," the Rev. Joseph Connors, S.V.D., of St. Mary's Seminary, Techny, Ill., was ready to substitute. His paper "Problems of the Content of Sunday Morning Sermons" was outstanding, a scholarly, factual, informative paper well appreciated by all.

On December 29 at the General Meeting the election of Officers was

held and the returns showed that the following Officers were chosen to guide the Homiletic Society for the ensuing year of 1961:

President: the REV. THOMAS V. LISKE, S.T.D., Chicago, Ill.

Vice President: the REV. PIUS LEABEL, C.P., Sierra Madre, Calif.

Secretary: the REV. JOHN P. O'DONNELL, Chicago, Ill.

Treasurer: the REV. JOSEPH T. KONKEL, Milwaukee, Wis.

The Nominating Committee of the Rev. John J. Halloran, S.J., St. Mary's, Kansas; the Rev. John J. Cunningham, Mt. St. Mary's Seminary, Norwood, Ohio; and the Rev. Joseph O'Neill, Beaverton, Ontario, Canada, presented the slate of above officers. There were no nominations from the floor.

A Resolutions Committee was appointed. The Rev. Gilbert Zlatar, O.F.M., San Francisco, California, served as Chairman assisted by the Rev. Joseph O'Neill of Beaverton, Ontario, and the Rev. Fidelis Goodman, M.M., Maryknoll, N.Y.

The Board of Directors voted on Washington, D.C., as the site of the 1961 Convention. The President appointed the Rev. Thomas Rover, O.P., Dominican House of Studies, Washington, D.C., as Chairman of the 1961 Convention to be assisted by the Rev. James McVann, C.S.P., St. Paul's College, Washington, D.C.

Presidential Address National Convention 1960

It is not my intention in this Presidential address to give a report on the State of the Society. I choose rather to talk about you: the most important teachers in the whole country, the teachers of Speech in our seminaries.

I recall the thrill I experienced at our Constitutional Convention in New York in 1958 when we, by good fortune, had His Excellency Bishop Fearn, Auxiliary Bishop of New York and former Rector of Dunwoodie Seminary, address us. In his keynote speech, he said, "I hope you Fathers realize how important you are! I remember my days as the Rector of the seminary. I could always find a priest to teach Dogmatic Theology, or Moral, or Sacred Scripture, Canon Law, or English. There were men especially trained to do just that and no more. But I realized that a Professor of Speech or Homiletics would have to know not only Dogmatic Theology, Moral, Scripture, Canon Law and English—he would also have to be able to teach his students how to express the theology in their heads, to translate dogma, moral, scripture, law, into living theology. The speech man must be extraordinary!" Those were his thrilling words.

Yes, the speech man in the seminary stands at the point of integration of all seminary studies. The Professor of Dogmatic Theology is by position interested only in the science of theology and not in showing his students how to create the living of the divine life. The Moral Theologian is interested in instructing how and when to forgive sins, not in directing his students how to create lives of virtue. The Canon Law Professor teaches what the Law means; he does not, for example, show his students how to speak to people effectively about the sanctity of marriage or the sacramental nature of the consecrated matrimonial state. The Scripture Professor teaches exegesis, but how often does he help the students steep their minds and hearts in the Word of God? How often does the Scripture Professor show his students how to transplant a living doctrine with all the warmth and color of the Sacred Scriptures?

Only the Professor of Speech can do all this!

Because the Professor of Speech is the most important teacher in the

seminary I should like to talk about the special qualities he should possess. Above all he must be a *man of vision*! He must see the utter necessity of good, effective preaching. He must be consumed with the desire to create effective, persuasive preachers of the Word of God. His vision of the world he must share with his students. Of all men he must be aware of the "alarming anemia of religion" which the saintly Pius 12th of blessed memory said must be attributed primarily to an ignorance of doctrine. The lives of so many Catholics are spiritually pallid, weak, bloodless because the sermons they hear are pallid, weak, bloodless. Too often, I am afraid, priests face their people—the poor, the miserable, the ignorant, the proud, sinners, saints, the satisfied, the selfish, the discouraged, the weary, the weak in faith, the negligent, the tempted, the aimless in life, the despairing, the morally reckless, the scrupulous, the lax, the confused—all of them aware in some degree that Catholic dogmas are not mere speculative principles but concrete guides—and the priestly speaker makes no attempt to answer their needs and no attempt to persuade them to action. At most there is that little dab at the very end, "Do this and be good." So often the only result is something like what a priest once told me happened to him after a sermon. A sweet old lady came up to him and said, "Father, your sermon was just lovely! It wasn't WHAT you said; it was how you said it!"

The earnest teacher of speech must take a look at the world to arouse himself and his students to persuasive preaching. There is a spiritual vacuum at the very heart of the lives of so many. Clarity about the larger aims of life has been dimmed. Superficial sermons are creating superficial spirituality. The past warns us!

I believe that the present state of the Catholic world is very similar to the state of religion in England just before the Reformation. Our knowledge of English History would cause us to believe that the Church was flourishing then just to look at the huge cathedrals, the many monasteries and convents, the number of priests and nuns. But how did it happen? History shows they loved the Mass but there was one serious weakness: the infrequency with which the average Catholic received Holy Communion. Everyone knew and believed in the doctrine of the Real Presence but the priests were not persuading the people to receive frequently; the people were not living Eucharistic lives because they had never been instructed by the preachers. "The great question that recurs at more than one crisis of the story of the tragedy that befell the Church is how far the Catholic of those times was adequately instructed in the nature of what he was doing! Catholics stood in the greatest need those days of constant reminder that among the acts of that virtue whose object is the worship of God—the virtue

specifically called Religion, which presupposes for the reality and fruitfulness of its various acts, a will wholly devoted to God; and this devotedness in the will derives from deep and rooted conviction in the intelligence, from truths alive, truths that are not assented to merely as speculations, but are realities that penetrate the whole mental make-up, intelligence, imagination, passions, likes and dislikes—truths that come to do all this as the effect of meditation. And the chief truths, meditation on which produces this effect are the truths of man's utter helplessness without God and of God's infinite will to save us."¹ The chief office of the preacher of the Gospel has been to assist the transformation in people from speculation to realization.

What was the quality of religious instruction given in those days to the ordinary Catholic?

"There can be no doubt that sermons were constantly preached. We have testimony to the fact that there were many books written to assist the clergy to prepare their sermons." These were called "Sleep-Wells," because they enabled the clergy to sleep well and comfortably on Saturday nights with the knowledge that the Sunday sermon was safely prepared."² There were books of "Exempla," entertaining stories which were not doctrinal. All of which only served to perpetuate the lazy preacher. Once the crisis in religion opened, with the first campaigns of Henry against the Holy Father, there were complaints of the bishops about the inefficiency and indeed the all but non-existence of capable preachers. One historian says, "It is an anxious thought that the kind of knowledge of Scripture shown in the sermons which do not merely call upon the Sacred text to furnish illustrations and instances, and the all but insane use of allegory, are witness to a science that has touched the last depths of pedantic decay. The moral homilies—their picturesque and entertaining stories apart, and the pithy language and salted descriptions—are too often sterile and barren of true spirituality, as moral homilies ever tend to be when the preacher does not, as by instinct, relate morality always as a Christian thing to grace, see it as the positive activation of the supernatural virtues and as a matter of the soul's loving union with God."³

"The sermon of those days was rarely dull—it was to some extent, the main entertainment of the time—a keen critical view of society, of the world and all its fashions, set forth in racy virile language, with witty and ruthless satire."⁴ On its purely doctrinal side the English pulpit of those days

1. Hughes, *The Reformation in England* (Macmillan, 1951) p. 93.

2. Davis, *Mediaeval England* (Oxford, 1924) p. 423.

3. Hughes, *Op. Cit.*, p. 98.

4. Hughes, *Op. Cit.*, p. 98.

had little inspiration to offer. We need go little further in our search for the secret of the general apostasy: there was an indifference to theology, a failure to emphasize the dependence of spirituality on revealed doctrine, a disastrous lack of persuasive doctrinal sermons.

From time to time in the history of our own country there have been periods when the piety of Catholics was at a low ebb, because there were either no sermons in some places or only monthly talks. Lately the Bishops of our country have released a statement in which they deplore the lack of responsibility on all levels of society and in almost all departments of American life.

Men of vision are needed to instruct the preachers of the future to become persuasive speakers. I should say this is the most important work the teacher of speech in a seminary must do. Never be content with having taught fine articulation and good bodily movement or clarity of the expression of ideas. Teach them to move that audience to action! Teach them how to translate belief in the dogmas into active living. For example, if you teach them the Mystical Body don't say, "This is mystifying, so don't expect too much from your audience." No, show them how to preach Reparation for the sins of the world—a thrilling doctrine—the law of charity by which we share the weariness of the sick, sympathize with the weak and desperate, the dogma of the Communion of Saints, the meeting of souls in God, living and dwelling in one, sharing their treasures and their forces with a hospitality which surpasses anything that has ever been seen; teach them that sin is adultery, for it is the forcible expulsion of the Holy Spirit, dwelling in us to incorporate us to Jesus Christ, for the union which He contracted with us at Baptism is such that marriage is only a faint symbol of it.

Yes, I believe that all teachers of speech in seminaries must be men of vision, looking back to learn from the past to avoid the disastrous mistakes of careless and inefficient preachers and looking forward in a disordered world to create preachers who know how to translate dogmas into living.

The second quality the teacher of speech in the seminary must have is *a sense of dedication to his work*. No one knows better than I that teaching is arduous work, and teaching speech is especially wearying, but I say the teacher of speech in the seminary must be entirely devoted to his task, because he is preparing the most important speakers in the land. That is why he must be unrelenting, demanding in his task. Strictness must be the law of his life as a teacher. He must keep reminding the complaining student that he does not wish to release poor speakers on an unsuspecting public! He must be dedicated to the drudgery of fashioning each speaking personality, reorganizing the emotional life of the student, patiently elimi-

nating defects. Dedicated teachers of speech will create effective preachers of the Word!

Another necessary quality to be found in the teacher of speech is knowledge of all phases of speech. We need teachers who are not mere voice trainers in seminary courses. The seminary speech man must know not only voice training techniques, but also the art of delivery, the composition of speeches, and the art of analyzing the audience. Let me say here that I do not think equipment, such as tape recorders, elaborate control rooms and individual studios for "practice sermons," is really necessary. The best equipment is the dedicated teacher of speech!

It would be ideal if, in every seminary, we had trained teachers of speech, who not only could train the philosophers in the fundamentals of speech, but also take the theologians and show them how to write and deliver dogmatic sermons on the subject matter of the treatises they were studying that year. For example, when the treatise on Grace is being studied, the professor of speech should be able to show the students how to compose, and deliver sermons on Grace. When that day comes, we will have nothing but effective preachers in every pulpit in the land!

While we stress the qualities necessary in the teacher of speech in the seminaries, we do not mean to imply that the Catholic Homiletic Society is an aristocracy, that it is for teachers only. No, indeed! This is a Society of and for the parish priests, the retreat masters, the missionaries, the occasional speakers as well. Our lofty aim is to create effective speakers in all fields of the priesthood! This, however, will never be done unless the teachers of speech in our seminaries realize first that they are extraordinary men, outstanding teachers, who are always aware that the influence of conquerors shrivels to insignificance if compared to the transformation of human living achieved by speakers dedicated to communicating the Divine Word!

THOMAS V. LISKE, S.T.D.

Teaching Sermon Delivery

One morning during World War II, I boarded a bus in downtown Los Angeles, Pershing Square, going out Santa Monica way. I sat down alongside a young Navy Ensign and we were soon in conversation. He was carrying a cane, for he was convalescing from shrapnel wounds in his leg; he had been in the battle of the Midways and “gone over the side” of the Yorktown. I soon learned that he was not a Catholic, though calling me “Padre” as all the Navy boys do. We talked for some time about news items in the headlines and in the world of sports. We were getting well along Wilshire Boulevard, when he raised his arm and pointing to the gold braid on his sleeve, said to me: “Padre, that is getting pretty shiny. That would have worried me a few months ago. But when you go over the side and you are out there in the water and you don’t know what is ahead of you—*your sense of values changes.*”

The words of that young man have haunted me. How true it is that when we are face to face with reality—in a crisis or in moments of sober thinking—we see things altogether different. We have come here to do serious work. The varied conflicting values of our modern topsy-turvy world do not concern us but for us HOMILETICS should be all important! It is so easy to get into a routine; to become matter of fact; not exactly indifferent but to just go through the motions of a job; to lose our enthusiasm—to miss the tremendous significance and value of our work.

All of us are preaching. Most of us are teaching but to teach well we must be on fire for this very important work. We have come here to help one another so that we, in turn, may help others. But first of all we must help ourselves—try to recapture some of our ideals and to value rightly the magnificent ministry of the Word.

In his Encyclical on the Christian Education of Youth, Pope Pius XI quoted St. Gregory Nazianzen’s estimate, that “teaching is the art of arts and the science of sciences.” We do not teach an art in the same way that we teach a science. A music or literature class differs greatly from one in Mathematics, Chemistry or Philosophy. An art requires appreciation

whilst a science is experimental and systematic truth. Skills, of course, are developed in both if hard work will complement native talent. Learning is never easy and most of the work must be done by the student. A teacher's greatest task is to enthuse others, to inspire them and guide them to success or achievement. The subject of homiletics is very much creative and is preeminently both an art and a science. Accordingly, it has a very definite nature, a definite function, definite tools and rules.

However, before considering technique in teaching sermon delivery, we must never forget that the ministry of the Word is something sacred and *supernatural*. Preaching is a supernatural act, seeking a supernatural end and should therefore be done in a supernatural manner. St. Thomas points out that St. Paul shows the *proper* manner in which preaching *should be accomplished*, saying my word should be "in the showing forth of the spirit and power." It is not by cleverness or brilliance or any other *human* means that the preacher will accomplish his purpose for he speaks things which are *beyond* the reach of human cleverness, brilliance or *human* effort. Paul preached but *GOD* gave the increase. Our sole purpose in preaching is the salvation and sanctification of souls—to give God greater honor and glory. His grace is absolutely necessary, is most important and alone truly effective. We are but instruments—perhaps even poor ones. *Our* work is to *dispose* souls, to sow the seed and cultivate the field. What a sublime vocation to thus share God's work in souls! He does not work alone; in God's plan, *grace and nature* work together; the supernatural always uses and perfects the natural.

Consequently, holiness of life or sanctity is the first requisite for a successful preacher and we who would teach effective preaching should exemplify it in our daily lives if we would inspire others to highest ideals. Relying completely on the grace of God, we must also do everything in our power to improve ourselves and use as best we can all the wonderful *POWERS of NATURE* that God has given us. Preaching consists of both soul and body action; it is the *combined* effort of intellect, will and emotions so that teaching sermon delivery means attention to *all* these factors. No *one* of them can be *neglected* or *overstressed*.

Pope Pius XII speaking to the Roman Lenten preachers in 1946, said to them: "When St. Paul denied that he preached with artifice, or affectation, what he rejected was really *superfluous* ornamentation, useless subtleties, bombastic phrases for special effect; all the jumble that is not fitting to the dignity and majesty of the pulpit. The *strength* of the *Spirit* which was in him, gave to his words, efficacy and power—(I Cor. 12, 1-4)—AND gave *value* to *all the gifts* of his rich nature. Paul, though moved by the Spirit,

was *still himself*! Out of such a *union of the Spirit and nature* arose his inimitable and comparable eloquence. In modest measure, even the most modest that can be imagined, each preacher may share in this eloquence with this provision that, though assisted by the Holy Spirit he *remains himself* and provided that thanks to the use which he makes of his *gifts of nature*, the words flow from his lips with such a warmth, color and sound of their own that they give a *personal* and *spontaneous* form to the common truths.

The holy Cure of Ars did not have the natural gifts of Segneri or Bossuet, but the vivid, clear, profound conviction which animated him, which resounded in his words, which shone in his eyes suggested to his imagination and to his *sensibility*, ideas, images and appropriate delightful comparisons which would have captivated a St. Francis de Sales. Such preachers really hold their audiences."

In his famous address to all the Roman Seminarians, he said: "That your education may be fruitful, it is necessary and we earnestly exhort you to this, that the knowledge which you draw from your courses, be *NOT directed* merely to the *passing of examinations*, but that it leave a permanent stamp upon your minds never to be effaced, which will enable you, when the need arises to *express in speech and writing* whatever serves to propagate Catholic truth and bring men to Christ."

From these words, may we infer the important part that we have in seminary training. If there is a work to be done, there must also be a *way* in which it should be done. My concern today is *effective sermon delivery*—how to procure it and as it specially concerns many of us, *how to teach it*? To become a most effective Preacher we must become a saint and we must work hard, yet at times we may not be striving for holiness or working very hard and still hope to be effective. It is this hard work—the using and developing of *natural gifts* of human means, I principally want to discuss.

St. Augustine, the greatest of the Latin Fathers, devotes the whole of the fourth book of his "De Doctrina Christiana" to a discussion on the use of *Rhetorical* eloquence in the service of truth. He asks: "Should the enemies of God proclaim their falsehoods briefly, explicitly and plausibly while we tell the *truth* in such a way that it is tedious to listen to, difficult to understand and finally disagreeable to believe? Should these, influencing and urging the minds of their listeners to *error* by their eloquence, terrify, sadden, gladden and passionately encourage them, while we indifferent and cold in behalf of truth, sleep on? Who is so foolish as to claim this? The power of eloquence, so very effective in convincing us of either wrong or right, lies open to all. Why then do not the good zealously procure it that

it may serve truth, if the wicked to gain unjustifiable and groundless cases, apply it to the advantage of injustice and error?"

Are we, dear Fathers, meeting the challenge of today? Pope Benedict XV in his magnificent Encyclical on Preaching, "*Humani Generis*," remarks that "Those who are engaged in preaching are more numerous today than ever before" and then sadly adds: "Yet there is a general disregard and forgetfulness of the supernatural, a gradual falling away from the strict standards of Christian virtue and men are slipping back more and more into the shameful practices of paganism." This, our present Holy Father also tells us—and the theme and burden of the coming Ecumenical Council is to be "How to meet secularism and naturalism." Pope Benedict asked: "Has the word of God then ceased to be what it was described by the Apostle, living and efficient and keener than a two-edged sword" (Heb. 4, 12). If that weapon does not everywhere produce its effect, the blame must be laid to those ministers of the Gospel who do not handle it as they should." Looking for the reasons of our present failure, he says: "They may be reduced to three, for either the one chosen to preach is not the *right person*, or his office is not performed with the *right intention* or in the *RIGHT WAY*."

To determine the *right way*, I think we should recall a few fundamental principles. A sermon is a composite. Everything in nature has matter and form, whether it be a rock or a diamond, a carrot or a rabbit or a human being. A sermon also has matter or content and it has form. It may be an instructive talk directed principally to the intellect to *explain*. It may be argumentative built of reasons to *convince* the mind, or it may be a persuasive sermon filled with motives to appeal to and move man's will and emotions.

A sermon should also be tightly organized—it must be a unity. There must be unity of thought for everything that is said should bring out one central thought. There should be unity of feeling so that however many emotions may be touched, all should tend to produce the desired mood. Both these unities should be subordinate to unity of *purpose* which means that everything in the sermon shall fulfill the speaker's aim. To say it in another way, there must be a specific definite purpose—a specific definite theme to achieve it, and a definite mood or sentiment pervading and suitable to the purpose and theme. Certainly a sermon thus constructed will conduce to a more effective and dynamic delivery which is the third element in preaching. Matter, form and delivery. Mood and matter may determine delivery—surely they are *not* the *same* for a Sunday sermon, a meditation or a formal talk.

For these reasons I think that the HOMILETICS professor should be in charge of both the writing and speech courses in the Major Seminary. Writing and speaking are creative work, individualistic and personalized. He needs the four years to properly evaluate the student's talents, their particular style and personalities in order to helpfully guide them. Our work cannot be done on a production basis—turning them all out according to one mold. We must therefore present or show them different molds or models. For example, emotional or persuasive sermons may be formal set sermons or meditations which are again divided into doctrinal and historical talks. Meditations on the Sacred Passion are historical and there are three ways of constructing them and the form, style and delivery must suit each type. All are equally good and effective but we must leave it to the individual student to choose and develop that way which best suits his likings, capabilities and personality. What a horrible catastrophe if all my students were to be like me! For this reason, as a hobby and a help to teaching, I have collected the class lectures, sermon techniques and some sermons of all my predecessors in HOMILETICS during the past one hundred years in order to correlate them and give the students a comprehensive view of preaching. Should we not consult the best of the past as well as the present great preachers?

When Cardinal Manning made his retreat for episcopal consecration, he came to one of our monasteries and in his diary for June 2, we read: "Someone said to me when the election was known, 'Now you will never hear the truth again.' Everybody in a high place stands in a room full of mirrors and sees himself multiplied without end by a servile reflection." This is often true of others, too. In a way a pastor is in a high place; a priest does not often hear the truth about himself—the truth about his preaching. Therefore we must teach him well and try to preclude much criticism. My experience is limited to teaching young priests in the year after ordination. Our rule has always required a fifth year of Theology called *Sacred Eloquence* which is a year devoted to the writing and delivery of all types of sermons.

Our procedure is as follows: Lectures are given daily on the theory of writing and delivery. When a sermon topic is assigned or one of several subjects is selected by the student priest, he must first submit a complete outline for discussion and approval. After the sermon has been written, he submits the manuscript for correction and final approval.

Each student then practices the delivery of his sermon and he may have the coaching of his professor if he wishes. After this, the class assembles in the chapel and as each Father preaches, his sermon is tape recorded.

On a rather elaborate correction sheet, his various mistakes are checked and specific criticism is jotted down. On the following days, the student and I replay the tape with the correction sheet before us and we try to analyze it as best we can.

During the following week, he reworks his talk and prepares a section or sections he wants filmed. Each student is filmed privately with a 16 mm. sound camera. After these films have been processed, the students and I run the film six times—three times with sound, three times silently. His mistakes are quite obvious and he is asked to point them out and then I will note others he may have missed. This is a brutal procedure but the truth is on the screen and cannot be denied. By the same token, this technique can also be very encouraging and definite progress can be seen for he is filmed every two months. The first film is often taken at a distance of 15 or 20 feet to show his general appearance, posture, poise and bodily action. The second film is at five feet to give a close-up of his face—to show movements of the head, blinking eyes, lazy lips and jaws, open mouth or exaggerated display of teeth. The third film is often a half length picture to combine bodily action with a close view of the face. The fourth film is a close shot of the Father seated at a table giving a conference in order to capture his mannerisms in this type of delivery.

Since the young priests feel embarrassed preaching before the class and may think that the camera and lights are unnatural or strange, they may excuse their mistakes with the remark that in a church, before a live audience they do better. So on Sunday mornings or during 40 hours devotion, I periodically visit the churches where they are preaching, going always in disguise—in a soft shirt and jacket—so that I will not be detected. My experience proves that if one has bad speech faults, they will be just as manifest in the pulpit as before the camera or tape recorder.

On Saturday mornings, all the young priests teach catechism classes to the public school children in various parishes, working with the Confraternity program of the diocese. One evening a week they teach an adult class of those who are preparing themselves as Confraternity teachers. This is invaluable experience and gives them the "feel" of audiences at different levels. For every sermon that is given must be geared to subject matter, occasion and audience. Through catechetical instructions, they improve in audience contact.

During Lent, each young priest accompanies a senior or veteran missionary on a parish mission, as an observer and helper. He helps with the preaching as much as he is able to do. The long hours in the confessional help him to be more practical in his own writing and preaching and he can

watch an experienced man in action who also can give him much good advice and help in sermon delivery.

To complete our course in teaching effective delivery, we started what are called "Refresher Courses." A two weeks' course is given in each monastery to review some unit of the Sacred Eloquence year. A five-year plan is the ideal envisioned. So far I have given three courses. All the junior clergy for five years after ordination are required to take it, for all others it is optional. But an interesting item is that two-thirds of the classes have been Seniors which speaks for the interest in and the advantages of the Course. Some have been ordained twenty years and more. Two lectures are given each morning on the theory of the particular sermon type reviewed and all members of the class preach both weeks. These sermons are tape recorded. The afternoon is spent in "playbacks." Besides the theory and practice, all sermons written by the Junior Fathers since the last course, are submitted for reading and approval.

To conclude, my dear Fathers, I should like to present a few of the basic reasons for our technique, following the divisions of E. F. von Hesse. Good sermon delivery as St. Ignatius so well expresses it, must be "adapted" to the audience. There are three elements that must be considered. As we preach, What do people see? What do people hear, and What do people feel?

Remember we preach for Christ, to deliver God's word to people who want to hear and need to hear. The preacher's bearing and his appearance should be therefore such as we would associate with the Announcer of *God's* word, graceful and dignified. Poise and posture mean so much for both health and speech. How do we stand and how do we walk to the altar and pulpit? Bodily attitude and action are most expressive of one's self. Since speech is a matter of using the body properly, poise of body has much to do with poise of tone. How we carry our weight affects our throat muscles.

If you slump down on your vocal apparatus, you cannot expect a free, easy tone. The release of your throat depends upon the ease and freedom of your body. Tension of body will always be reflected in the voice. Furthermore, to speak properly one must breathe properly, for a person speaks only so well as he breathes. Voice is vocalized breath and controlled breath is most essential to good speaking. But to breathe properly we must stand properly. People may not notice that you do, but they will certainly be influenced if you do not.

All these things are noted by the camera: shifting weight, body swaying, shoulders slumped and uneven, half crouches, lounging on the lectern, grasping microphones, which are all distracting to an audience and impair

delivery. Often we appear to disadvantage compared to all that they see in the movies or on their T.V. set.

Good speakers can never neglect voice culture. The principles of good speaking, as voice placement, resonant, velvet, pure tones and good diction should have been taught down below us in the minor seminary and college departments. It is proven that a resonant voice will carry seventeen times further than volume but countless numbers of priests have not mastered good voice placement. The tape recorder and sound camera can help much. I find that the sound camera is more sensitive and helpful. Consequently in our teaching there should be routine, constant vocal exercises in order to overcome faults and to develop a good voice.

Vocal exercises are a drudgery most wearisome to the teacher and often neglected by students. But they *produce results* as many examples prove. In his book, "William Pardow of the Company of Jesus," the author says of this eloquent preacher: "Those who only heard the eager and fiery eloquence of Fr. Pardow's later years, might well suppose him to have been a man with a *natural talent* for preaching; that the secret of moving men's souls had been his to some extent from the beginning. Yet this was not the case. His early efforts at preaching were below rather than above the average and the young Jesuit struggled for many years before he attained that security of touch, that knowledge of human nature, that combined vividness and austerity of style, that carrying power of voice and clearness of diction, produced without apparent effort, which combined to make his preaching what it was. Yet not one of these things was his *by nature*. *Not one* was his when he emerged from his 17 years of training. He won them for himself, laboriously at the price of incredible pains."

Fr. Pardow personifies the value of vocal exercises. Though busy as a Rector, he never refused an invitation to preach. Of his first efforts, we are told: "His voice had not ceased to give trouble, in spite of the pains he had taken with it. He either shrieked or failed to make himself heard. The nerve strain was evident to his hearers and distracted their attention from the thoughts he was trying to drive home. Some years later, it was suggested to him that his voice lacked resonance and that it could be made to carry by proper placement. Whereupon, he arranged with a prominent teacher of singing to train his voice and worked faithfully at his voice calisthenics in the face of a great deal of sarcastic comment. Gradually, instead of strident tones, a voice of amazing power and resonance began to develop."

Finally, what do people feel as we preach to them? They live so much by their emotions! Most persuasion today is directed to their emotional

life. Television, radio, modern advertising and writing and most modern living, social and religious, are emotional. Virtue and vice play with and depend upon emotions. "The fool has said in *his heart*, there is no God." Not in his mind but *in his heart*. To reach people emotionally we must write as well as *preach* emotionally. How, then, to teach this?

St. Vincent Strombe, an eminent authority on eloquence, says: "The preacher therefore who ought to do his best to turn his hearers from evil and to write them to good, will try *his utmost* to enter not only into their understanding by the light of instruction, but force his way into their hearts by the fire of his expressions, in order to inflame it, excite it, arouse it up, instill into it pious considerations, tender affections, holy sentiments of compunction, a hatred of vice, a love and desire of virtue, and above all, the love of our Beneficent God."

Cicero said that he who knows the art of moving the passions is a *perfect* orator, and *without this quality*, adds Quintilian, all the rest is useless and of no weight. Fr. Benard in his excellent brochure on appealing to the emotions in preaching, writes, "It is quite beyond question that a major element in the formation of a decision is almost *invariably the emotional one*, and a sound and skillful use of the appeal to the emotions is not a mere optional embellishment of the sermon but a most important factor in the accomplishment of its aim."

But emotion can be enkindled only by a like emotion. We cannot inflame the hearts of others unless our own are on fire. To again quote St. Vincent Strombe: "Bring to your mind a lively idea and conception of your sermon (and for this end read it over carefully), be full of your subject and endeavor to be so penetrated with its truth that those effects that you wish to produce in others may *more eminently exist in yourself*. Thus to feel or to be thus penetrated is necessary still more when you are in the art of preaching."

The very excellent Curry School of Expression at Boston builds and develops its course on the principle that we can *express* only to the extent that we are *impressed*. The Morse School of St. Louis says, all expression is *inward-outward*. People quickly sense our zeal and sincerity, whether we are inwardly moved.

We all often think deeply, have strong inner convictions, but our voice and body do not adequately express them. My experience has been, that in listening to the tape recordings and watching the sound movies, most priests are *surprised*, or even *shocked*, at their lack of expression. Their faces are not mobile but deadpan and stern; their voices are not vibrant and convincing; they do not preach like Paul. For Festus, the governor of

Cesarea, said to him: "Thou art beside thyself, thou art *mad*" (Acts 26-24); and Agrippa said to Paul: "In a little while, thou persuadest me to become a Christian" (Acts 26-28).

Consequently, to teach and improve sermon delivery, I feel that during seminary days, more emphasis should be placed upon oral interpretation—interpreting the masterpieces of literature as well as plain, simple discourse. If they are about and for humans and by humans, they are eminently emotional. They portray love and hatred, fear and hope, sorrow, gratitude, wonder and awe mostly in reference to human persons and events, whilst our preaching of course is about a Divine person and supernatural events. But the emotions are the same, and I find that voices are not flexible enough, rich and vibrant and able to convey all the subtle meanings locked up in cold, abstract words. Voices lack range and rhythm, do not use pause and timing that are so effective, and do not enunciate clearly, and would be greatly helped by *more interpretative* work.

I have always liked Canon Sheehan's definition of the priesthood: "The virtue of loving men and the talent of making them know it." Priests love souls intensely, and are zealous, but often lack the talent, or do not sufficiently develop the talent of making men know it. Their sermons as well as their speech are not alive. Your I. Q. is important but more vital to good preaching is your P. Q.—your *personality* quotient.

"Unction," in the words of a French writer, is the special language of the Holy Spirit who penetrates all hearts with marvelous sweetness." One of the great preachers of all times was St. Paul of the Cross. And why was he so eloquent and effective? His biographer asks: "Was it by the newness and beauty of the *truths* he preached? Or was it that the touching pathos of his voice and his own deep emotion communicated irresistibly to his hearers the burning convictions of his soul? When we examine the canonization records, we observe at once that *every deposition* insists particularly on his accent of conviction, his unction and the feeling in his voice; indeed, only *one* witness referred to the novelty or special beauty of *WHAT* he preached."

Because a saint, he had a proper sense of values, and because a saint, worked tirelessly to the age of 84 to properly express them. His life is a challenge!

PIUS LABEL, C.P.

The Moral Obligation Of Preaching

The Old Testament prophets were men chosen to speak for God. Modern thought and usage have tended to limit the word to mean one who foretells the future. But foretelling the future was only a minor and incidental part of the prophet's work. The main function of the prophet was to preach God's word for Him, to speak for God.

In Christ, of course, God has The Prophet who speaks for Him perfectly—so perfectly, indeed, that Christ in His very nature is called the Word of God. "And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14).

Christ established His Church and constituted His Priesthood to continue His work. As He combined in Himself the three roles of prophet, priest and ruler, so those whom He would send would also combine in themselves this threefold function. We call them priests, but they are prophets and rulers as well as priests. The role of prophet is as integral a part of the Christian Priesthood as the role of sacrificer. Indeed, Ecclesiastical History testifies to the time when the priests exercised their role of prophet more than their role of offering sacrifice.

In the Old Testament God revealed Himself in words and in deeds. Revelation lives on in the Church. Revelation in deed continues in the Sacraments. Revelation in word is also present, in the teaching and preaching of the Church. Christ has constituted official and authentic witnesses or prophets—men appointed and invested by God with the power to speak for God.

By the will of Christ, preaching is not only commanded, but it is an *essential* element in making the Gospel known.¹ Christ sent the Apostles and their successors to preach the Gospel to every creature. Indeed, in the intention of Christ, preaching was to be the *principle* means for opening to men the way of salvation, and for the propagation and building up of the Kingdom of God.²

1. Gregorianum, Vol. 40 (1959), *Il problema teologico della predicazione*, by Alszegehy-Flick, p. 742.
2. Gregorianum, *Op. Cit.*, p. 701.



*CATHOLIC HOMILETIC
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The Catholic Homiletic Society

THIRD ANNUAL CONVENTION

DECEMBER 1960



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 Rev. Thomas V. Liske, S.T.D., President; His Eminence Albert Cardinal Meyer; His Excellency Archbishop William Cousins;
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The Apostles were well aware, not only of their duty to preach, but also of the importance of their preaching in the Divine Plan. "It pleased God, by the foolishness of our preaching, to save those who believe" (1 Cor. 1:21). Even more than this: "Faith *depends* on hearing" (Rom. 10:17). It was only natural that the Apostles should consider the "ministry of the word" (Acts 6:4) as one of their principle duties. "We cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard . . . we are witnesses" (Acts 4:20, 5:32). Because of his strong realization of the power of the good news, St. Paul had to cry out: "Woe to me if I preach not the Gospel" (1 Cor. 9:16). This same compelling conviction caused him to urge Timothy to "preach the word, be urgent in season and out of season" (2 Tim. 4:1-2). For their preaching was pregnant with power (1 Cor. 2:4); their preaching was Christ in action, the word of God living and efficient and keener than any two edged sword (Hebr. 4:12).

Preaching performed by a duly authorized minister is penetrated here and now with the power of Christ. The ordained and authorized preacher performs a sacred action above the level of ordinary human discourse.³ The power of the Spirit is present in his words.

Because of this profound truth, the Church has—and indeed must, if she is to remain true to her divine mission—always insisted upon the importance of preaching. Benedict XV wrote: "preaching is the means divinely employed to continue the work of eternal salvation, and . . . it must with just reason be looked upon as a matter of greatest and most momentous concern."⁴ Pius XII called preaching "that primordial instrument of the faith."⁵ The IV Lateran Council (1215) showed that the Church was keenly conscious of the great necessity of sermon preaching. The Council declared that just as material food was indispensable for the human body, so spiritual food was imperative for the proper nourishment of the soul.⁶

Now it is true that only the Apostles and their successors in the Episcopacy have received directly the Divine Command to preach. This is their right and their most serious duty. But Christ also constituted lower orders of prophets—priests and deacons. In virtue of the Sacrament of Orders which they receive, they have the radical power to preach authoritatively. By ordination they are made true helpers of the Bishop. When commissioned by him, these prophets also preach in the name of the Church. The word of God on their lips, too, is pulsing with the power of Christ, vital

3. Clergy Review, Vol. 45 (1960), p. 527.

4. Benedict XV, *Humani Generis* (June 15, 1917).

5. Pius XII, Sept. 14, 1956, *The Pope Speaks*, Vol. 3 (1957), p. 381.

6. Schroeder, *Disciplinary Decrees of the General Councils*, p. 250.

with the action of His Spirit.⁷ Others can, and have, in the Church's history, received a commission to preach. But these preached, not by reason of any power of orders (even though they were subdeacons) but solely by reason of the jurisdiction granted to them.⁸ The Church has never wavered in her conviction that the office of preaching is a priestly office.⁹ St. Thomas taught that "to preach and hear confessions are acts involving both power of jurisdiction and power of order."¹⁰

Pope Pius XII assured us in *Menti Nostrae*: "All priests may apply to themselves with full right the words of the Apostle of the Gentiles: 'We are God's helpers'."¹¹ On the day of our ordination the Bishop solemnly pointed out to us the fundamental duties of a priest. Among these duties is that of preaching. "By your preaching . . . may you build the house that is the family of God." "The office of the priest is . . . to preach." In his monumental encyclical on the Priesthood, Pius XI did not hesitate to say that for a priest "the 'ministry of the word' is a right which is inalienable; it is a duty which cannot be disallowed, for it is imposed by Jesus Christ himself."¹²

So far we have seen that Christ constituted the Apostles and their successors as preachers. Preaching, for them, is a solemn duty. Moreover, preaching is the principle means of spreading and nourishing the faith. But this duty is not confined to the Bishops. By their ordination priests, too, are bound to this duty of speaking for God, always presupposing their mandate from the Church.

We may now proceed to the purpose of this paper. How serious is this duty to preach?

The obligation of using a particular means to an end must be judged, first of all, from the end to be achieved. How important is the end in view, what obligation is there to strive for this goal? Secondly, how intimately related is this particular means to the goal? In other words, is this simply one of several equally good ways to reach that goal?

Now it is patent that the purpose or goal of preaching is the same goal which the Church has for her activities. As Pius XII put it, the aim of the Church's preaching is "to make a man a Christian, to infuse into man the truth, the life, and the riches of the grace of God."¹³ We need not delay in developing the importance of this goal, nor in stressing the general obli-

7. *The Pope Speaks*, Vol. 1 (1954), p. 158.

8. Allgeier, *The Canonical Obligation of Preaching*, p. 10.

9. Weigl, *Stir Up the Fire*, p. 157.

10. *Contra impugnantes Dei cultum et religionem*, cap. 4 (Parma 15, 17).

11. Pius XII, *Menti Nostrae*, Sept. 23, 1950.

12. Pius XI, *Ad Catholicos Sacerdotii*, Dec. 20, 1935.

13. Pius XII, Sept. 14, 1956. *The Pope Speaks*, Vol. 3 (1957), p. 387.

gation of a priest to work for the consummation of this purpose. This is the sole and sum purpose of his priesthood and his every priestly act: that men might have life and have it more abundantly (Jn. 10:10).

What is the relationship of preaching to the attainment of this goal? We have already seen that in the intention of Christ, preaching was to be the principle means for achieving this goal. The Apostles considered this ministry their principle duty. The Vicars of Christ have stated that preaching is the principle means for continuing the work of Christ.

The value and importance of using this particular means is seen from the effects produced by preaching. Preaching is the ordinary means of grace for the sinner. It withdraws a man from his disorderly conduct, keeps him conscious of the evil of wrongdoing, and reminds him of the joys of heaven. Preaching revives the faith, raises the mind to filial hope and rekindles the fire of love. Thus predisposed and prepared by the word of God, the soul will receive in the sacraments new and more abundant graces to fecundate and nourish the seed sown in preaching. That is why the minister of the sacrament should be at the same time the minister of the word.¹⁴ In the words of that tireless preacher, Pius XII: "Whenever it (the word of God) really sounds forth . . . the shouts of the mob, sighs of pain and cries of passion seem to die out all of a sudden, and deep within the spirit . . . an encouraging rustle of hope begins to rise."¹⁵

The importance, the duty of preaching becomes even clearer, perhaps, if we consider the evils which follow from a lack of preaching. The Holy Spirit assures us: "When a people no longer hears the voice of a prophet, it is soon corrupted" (Prov. 29:18). "If someone should suppress the teaching of preachers," says St. Gregory, "the hearts of those in whom eternal hope germinates would quickly dry up."¹⁶ Pope Benedict XV pointed out that the Apostles were not living in better times than ours, they did not find minds more readily disposed towards the Gospel. Continued use has not blunted the edge of that sword which St. Paul described as living and efficient and keener than any two edged sword.¹⁷ That sword is simply not being wielded today. It is sheathed and unused all too often. Pius XII lamented that in the matter of preaching "the gates of hell have had partial success."¹⁸

Preaching, then, is not merely a means of saving souls. It is a principle

14. *Worship*, Vol. 30 (1956), p. 632 ss, by Bea, S.J.

14. *Worship*, Vol. 30 (1956), p. 632 ss, by Bea, S.J.

15. Pius XII, Sept. 14, 1956, *The Pope Speaks*, Vol. 3 (1957), p. 382.

16. Quoted by Humbert of Romans, *Treatise on Preaching*, p. 6.

17. Benedict XV, *Humani Generis*, June 15, 1917.

18. Pius XII, Sept. 14, 1956, *The Pope Speaks*, Vol. 3 (1957), p. 388.

and most efficacious means. It is a divinely imposed means. Hence Msgr. Montini, as pro-secretary of State, could write that it is the foremost wish of the Pope that priests will share the conviction "that today, as in the early days of the Church, there is no task more essential than to proclaim to the world the word of God, no labor more apostolic than to carry out, in all its manifestations, the mission of preaching the Gospel."¹⁹ Our present Holy Father, in his encyclical on the Priesthood, reminds priests of their duties of preaching and teaching. "It is very important, indeed," he writes, "that the clergy carry out their work of teaching with zealous diligence. On this point St. Pius X says: 'It is imperative to insist upon and to urge this one thing: no priest is bound to any duty more important than this: no priest is bound by any obligation more imperative than this' (Acerbo Nimis)."²⁰

We could go on multiplying reasons and authorities. But these are, I submit, more than enough to show that every duly authorized priest has an obligation, as opportunity presents itself, to break the bread of God's word to His children. "The little ones have asked for bread, and there was none to break it unto them" (Lam. 4:4).

It is one thing to establish that an obligation exists. But moral science must do more. The moralist must attempt to delineate the gravity of an obligation, to show what constitutes a serious violation and what is a venial violation.

Those entrusted with the care of souls have a most serious obligation to preach to their people. For, to repeat, preaching is a principle and most efficacious means for achieving the goal of salvation and sanctification. To neglect that means for a large portion of the year or for a large portion of the flock, would deprive the faithful of a substantial help they have a right to receive. Normally it is impossible to supply this help in any way other than preaching. Hence, in virtue of the Divine Law, I believe that the omission of preaching in a parish for a total of three or four months would generally constitute a grave dereliction of a divinely imposed duty.

For pastors this duty from divine law is determined more exactly by the law of the Church. The Code obliges pastors to preach every Sunday. To ignore this obligation, for one month, is commonly held to be a serious sin.²¹ To neglect it even once, without a proportionate reason, would be a venial sin. "Great would be the mistake of the pastor of souls," said Pius XII, "who dedicated all his attention and efforts to the great sermons of

19. *The Pope Speaks*, Vol. 1 (1954), p. 158.

20. John XXIII, *Sacerdoti Nostri Primordia*, Aug. 1, 1959.

21. Allgeier, *Op. Cit.*, p. 49 ss.

the solemn feasts rather than dedicating it to his regular Sunday sermon or to his weekly catechisms; or of the pastor who would be content to turn over to his assistants this part . . . of his ministry."²²

Moreover, in the United States, the III Council of Baltimore commanded that on every Sunday and Feast of Precept, even in the summer-time, a five minute sermon be preached at all Masses, even the early morning Masses, every custom and pretext to the contrary notwithstanding.²³ This law still binds. To neglect this obligation, even once, without a proportionate reason, is a venial sin. To neglect it for one continuous month is a grave violation.²⁴

What about the practice, in some parishes, of never preaching at the early Mass on Sunday? Obviously it is a serious neglect of a duty imposed by Baltimore. But it seems to be more than that. I would consider it a grave violation of the Divine Law. Unless we are to deny the validity of the Papal Pronouncements on the necessity of preaching, or to question the evil effects they attribute to a lack of preaching, we must conclude, it seems to me, that the eternal salvation of the souls of these people could become gravely endangered. Certainly they are being deprived of the God-given means to help them live the fullness of the Christian life.

For the same reasons the same stern judgment must be made of the practice which prevails in some cities, of omitting sermons for three or four months during the summer. It is not merely a question of ecclesiastical laws, but a dereliction of a divine duty.²⁵

Most priests receive their livelihood as an emolument for the care of souls. They are under a sort of contract to give these souls those helps which are necessary and useful for their salvation and sanctification. Preaching is certainly preeminent among these.

But what about the priest who has no care of souls? His obligation is not one of justice. Nor does the Code legislate for him. Yet the nature of his priesthood is no different—he too is ordained to preach. Given the opportunity, charity urges him to help souls. "As priests all, all are called to the direct pastoral ministry of souls."²⁶ Preaching is just as powerful a help on his lips. "Truth, faith . . . creates a responsibility in the one who possesses it. The lamp is not to be put under the bushel . . . The compelling motive is Christ's love . . . 'For we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard' (Acts 4:20). Why should others perish because of a lack for

22. Pius XII, March 17, 1946, *Catholic Mind*, Vol. 44 (1946), p. 321.

23. *Acta et Decreta Conc. Balt.* III, No. 216.

24. *Abbo-Hannan, The Sacred Canons*, Vol. 2, p. 580.

25. Bouix, *Tractatus de Parocho*, Pars 1, sectio II, p. 587.

26. John XXIII, Jan. 27, 1960, third address to Roman Synod. NCWC News Service, April 1, 1960.

which their own ignorance is not so much to blame as the one who failed to give them the means of salvation? Who would be judged with the greater severity, if others should lack the saving truth through our selfishness, our guilty omission"²⁷ These serious words were spoken by Archbishop Montini to the laity! They are even more apposite for priests!

That there are practical difficulties involved in preaching cannot be gainsaid. Many good priests are convinced that these difficulties are sufficient to excuse them from the performance of a humanly difficult and, to many, distasteful duty. For that reason we have dwelt on the importance and efficacy of preaching. It is our conviction that only a profound realization of the power of Christ which is present in our preaching will remedy a sad and serious situation. Our Dogma and Scripture men must give us a theology of preaching!

But let us look, briefly, at the objective difficulties which are alleged against preaching. First: the time element. Mass must be over in 45 minutes. But a sermon can be preached, *easily*, in that time. With a drastic reduction of announcements, by reading the Epistle and Gospel in English while the celebrant reads them at the altar, eliminating the Leonine Prayers—this gives ample time for a 7 to 10 minute sermon. Certainly announcements of card parties, PTA meetings and parish socials are not more important than the word of God. The judgment of the Apostles comes readily to mind: "It is not desirable that we should forsake the word of God and serve at tables" (Acts 6:1).

Regarding the early Mass, it is frequently alleged that many of these people must leave to get to work. If this is true, I am amazed at the number of elderly women who have to work on Sundays! But even granting that it is true, are they so pressed for time that five or seven minutes more would make them late? Why not let the few who might be so pressed for time, leave right after the Communion of the Mass. No one would argue that the law of hearing an entire Mass is more important than the obligation of receiving instruction. Vermeersch envisages a situation where material integrity for confession should not be required or even allowed, if it would mean that the priest would have to neglect more serious duties, such as preaching.²⁸

But it is too hot during the summer to preach! Too hot for whom—the priest or the people? Our Protestant brethren do it, Sunday after Sunday. In military installations I have seen Catholic Chaplains rush their people

27. Archbishop Montini to Second World Congress of Lay Apostolate. NCWC News Service, Jan. 9, 1958.

28. Vermeersch, quoted by Donovan in *Hom. and Pastoral*, Vol. 43 (1943), p. 526.

out, hungry for the bread of God's word, while the Protestant Chaplain keeps his flock for 50 minutes to an hour -and preaches to them. Granted that it is hot and that preaching is fatiguing—but this inconvenience is hardly sufficient reason to deprive our people of the benefits of the word of God. It is an inconvenience foreseen by the Fathers of Baltimore when they prescribed preaching, even during the summertime. It is a sad situation when a priest hears one of the faithful complain that "We don't have preaching in our Church during the summer." It is a shocking situation when our people have to turn to the Protestant preachers on radio and television to get the inspiration they need.²⁹

"We are God's helpers" (1 Cor. 3:9). This profound truth should exercise a powerful fascination upon us and be an irresistible driving force. Pius XII wrote in *Summi Pontificatus*: "Can there be a greater or more urgent duty than to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ to the men of our times? Can there be anything nobler than to unfurl the Ensign of the King before those who have followed and still follow a false standard, and to win back to the victorious banner of the Cross those who have abandoned it?"³⁰

Our world is sick. The wailing tones which come from the hearts of our people, implores, unconsciously -like the sick man in his delirium -the coming of a Savior: a Savior it is within our power to give them. Do you remember Paul's vision at Tr  s, when the young man appeared to him and pleaded: "Come over into Macedonia and help us" (Acts 16:9). As we consider our world, our people, their needs and their sorrows, this vision is repeated for us. Our people sit in darkness, devoid of spiritual light. Their voices, burnt with insatiable thirst for the unknown God, call out to us: "You who are the light of the world, come and help us, come and save us!"

PAUL M. BOYLE, C.P., S.T.L., J.C.L.

29. Donovan in *Hom. and Pastoral*, Vol. 43 (1943), p. 524.

30. Pius XII, *Summi Pontificatus*, Oct. 20, 1939.

The Psychology of Audience Reaction: Personal Change Through Sermons

We might fittingly begin our discussion of the effects of a sermon on the hearers by an old familiar axiom, "whatever is received, is received according to the manner of the one receiving." The implications of this axiom could be analyzed in an almost infinite variety of ways. We might, for example, think about it in terms of food. While you must have a good piece of steak or some similar basic foodstuff, much of the effectiveness of the meal is yet determined by the skill of the cooking and serving. This involves the complicated process of adapting the meal to each person. The absence or presence of even small details can sometimes destroy the pleasure and impede the assimilation of what was basically good food. Too much salt, pepper or garlic or not enough can spoil for even a whole group, an otherwise excellent meal. It is not only the food itself that is important, therefore, but also the uniquely personal reactions of each participant in the meal.

Good preaching has much in common with the preparation and serving of a fine dinner. As we have to have proteins, carbohydrates or whatever one would call a basic staple diet, so we also have to have sound theological and philosophical doctrine to give a nourishing base to the literary, intellectual and spiritual meal we are presenting. But this is not enough. In fact, it may be sadly inadequate, much as an excellent piece of steak poorly cooked or salted too much can be a disappointment to everyone. The learned theologian or scholar by the absence of other necessary qualities in his presentation, can fail to produce an effective response in his hearers. Though he may be profound in his thoughts and intellectually alert to all the influential movements of his time, he may not adapt his material to suit all the subtle elements that go into absorption and assimilation in the audience itself.

It is this second phase of preaching—audience reaction—that, I take it, is our focus for the afternoon. We are therefore considering not so much the “whatever is received” which might be the fundamental, theological and philosophical soundness of our presentation but rather the human psychology of “the manner of the one receiving.” Excellent material will yet ultimately be determined in its effectiveness on its hearers by the way this material is received. It will not be assimilated if it is presented in such a manner that it tends to create either indifference, resistance or some other strong negative reaction in some or all of the receivers.

We do not mean to imply that there is no value in intellectual exposition alone or that other kinds of sermons and instructions are not equally valid and necessary. There is certainly an extremely wide range of sermon material, traditions and methods beyond the scope of our consideration here. But, if we consider “audience reaction” as implying moving the hearer to some kind of personal involvement and action, then more than a cold, impersonal, intellectual presentation would seem to be necessary.

What clues can we use to give us an entrée into the audience’s inner-personal world so that we may make our presentation effective and palatable? There are some special complexities here. It is difficult to tell people what to do in such a way that they can readily do it. As Shakespeare so well knew, “if to do were as easy as to know what were good to do, chapels had been churches and poor men’s cottages princes’ palaces.”¹ There is a vast difference between telling a person “what were good to do” and the process that brings about the internal, psychosomatic coordination and integration necessary to do this.

Through psychological research in counseling and psychotherapy, we have learned that people are most helped to make personal changes in conduct when they are aided to take counsel with themselves and interrelate the information they are receiving with their own inner world of personalized singularity. This would also seem to apply to the effects of a sermon. Each hearer has his own world of personal uniqueness. We could perhaps demonstrate this interrelationship by a triangle. One can conceive of the base of the triangle as symbolizing the general theological or philosophical knowledge that needs to be presented. These truths are the common need of the whole human race in that they contain the basic tradition of Christian faith and understanding. This constitutes the universal base. The point of the triangle symbolizes each one’s uniqueness. Applied for the moment to our own situation here, the information going out from this

¹ Shakespeare, W., *Merchant of Venice*, Act I, Scene 2.

platform will end in the unique world of each of you. This unique world is not only your intellectual understanding but includes also those subtle qualities which involve your emotions, instincts, soma, and the integration of these with your reason and will. In an Aristotelian sense that man is a rational animal, it is your animality interrelated and controlled by your rationality that will finally make operationally effective anything you hear here.

We have often heard the expression about winning an argument and losing a friend. Here we have an awareness that one can be logically consistent without being truly effective. One can be convincing in the sense that one can conquer another person intellectually and thus silence him. Yet one has not really persuaded him. Persuasion fails if a person is not motivated to carry out in his own unique world of experience and action the information presented to him.

In a passage of capital importance for a psychology of preaching St. Thomas illumines a well-known text from St. Paul with his usual profundity. It is the familiar text in which St. Paul is describing the quality of charity. He says, among other things, "If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels and have not charity, . . . it profiteth me nothing."² St. Paul then describes with a delicately fine discrimination, the qualities of charity:

Charity is patient, is kind: Charity envieth not, dealeth not perversely, is not puffed up; is not ambitious, seeketh not her own, is not provoked to anger, thinketh no evil: Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth with the truth; Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.³

St. Thomas poses the question, "If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels—why would it profit nothing?" He answers, first, that, "To speak with the tongues of men and of angels," is to be a most outstanding intellectual. In other words, we must conceive here of an intellect as brilliant as is humanly possible or of an exposition that only an angel could give. But, according to St. Thomas, if I have all this knowledge, understanding and skill in exposition but lack these Pauline qualities of charity, my presentation will come to nothing because no one would be effectively changed. Unless a presentation is permeated with a sense of Christlike love, of human belonging and sharing it will not move a person's will. More than cold analysis is needed. An intellectual appeal without some of

2. St. Paul, I Corinthians 13:1-3.

3. St. Paul, I Corinthians 13:4-7.

the warm qualities of sharing and belonging that St. Paul describes as the characteristics of supernatural charity, would seem therefore insufficient if one wishes to capture the personal commitment of the hearer.

How then, in relation to our audience, can we hope to arrive at this quality of charity as St. Paul and St. Thomas describe it? How do we move from the cold skeleton of a solid intellectual and theological structure—necessary as it is—to the warm flesh and blood of charity? We must go beyond the intellect to the will as it reasonably directs the emotions, instincts and soma. Only this will produce that growth in the cardinal virtues so necessary to the integrated order of operation and so basic to the formation of Christian character.

In the counseling and psychotherapy relationship where we attempt to achieve basic changes in self-understanding and action, we find the word “sympathy” to be important in describing the quality of this relationship. “Sympathy,” to be understood in this psychological sense, must first be coupled with another word with the same root, “empathy.” “Empathy” is often illustrated by the picture of an athlete pole vaulting. As he is trying to get his leg over the bar, invariably four or five people standing down below have their legs up helping him to get over. Somehow there is in the human condition a deep imitative sense of sharing. This seems somewhat instinctive and is apparently often unconscious. People are sometimes astonished when they see such a picture and realize that their legs were up in the air. But when we see another man struggling, even if it is in so simple a thing as trying to put his leg over a bar, we apparently are affected at the deepest levels of our own primitive urge to participate and help.

The word “sympathy” in contrast to “empathy” suggests a higher, more human and more directly conscious and rational sharing. “Sympathy” in this sense is not simply a kind of sharing in sorrow. We mean rather its Greek sense of a “feeling with” others. It suggests peoples’ conscious sharing of the human condition together. Counseling and psychotherapy seem most effective when the counselor has this “feeling with” others, this warm quality of commitment and belonging.

A purely intellectual presentation, however logical, sound and well structured, runs the danger of seeming to be impersonal and removed. None of us are attracted to love a skeleton. A skeleton always remains a foreboding figure. While it is a part of our humanity and we all know that we have a skeleton exactly like the one we see, yet it appears inhuman. It has none of the warmth of the human members that go around it and turn it into a man. “Sympathy” is the giving of this warm, human quality.

In a purely intellectual presentation especially of a somewhat abstract

sort, there can be implied too a kind of condescending superiority, or at least, a tone that seems to remove the speaker from others. This "I" passing judgment on "you," may be convincing in the intellectual sense, but it seems often to run the risk of leaving the other person "cold," as he may say. People are thus unable to assimilate and absorb what is said. "I" and "you" can be too far apart, too uncommitted, too removed. If "I" is a voice coming down from the Olympian heights then, of course, there is no humanity in that voice. By contrast, we have St. Paul's magnificent conception that it was not that we first loved God but that God first loved us and in order to communicate this love He took upon Himself the body of a man and became like unto us in all things save sin. This is what we mean by "sympathy." We mean this capacity to become like our audience, to be one of them, to share the innermost sense of their human condition.

When the weaknesses and strengths of the human condition are all shared together in the common voice of the speaker, there is no sense of removal or separation. No one is standing above another. The speaker is not heard as a sort of impartial observer who stands outside life and comments on it. This kind of observer usually does not win our attachment or move us to act on what he says. We are moved to act by a warm voice that is like us. It is, indeed, coming from outside us but it yet belongs to us in what we know we are and what we hope to be.

Let us look now at some of the things Our Lord said and did to see if we can get clues about the manner in which He carried out this process of being like man in all things save sin. How did He convey this deep sense of sharing the human condition? Let me pick two examples. The first reveals Our Lord's delicate understanding and sharing in human love and forgiveness. We recall the unforgettable scene where Mary Magdalene falls at the feet of Our Lord. He said nothing. He knew so well the value of silence. He knew the things Mary Magdalene was saying to herself. So He let her act out all these deep emotions of sorrow and repentance as she washed His feet with her tears. He let her use her precious ointment to anoint Him. He only spoke, you remember, when someone raised an objection. He only spoke to defend her: "because she has loved much, much is forgiven her." Our Lord here gave us a classic statement of human "sympathy." A sympathy which goes down to one of the deepest and most intimate levels of feminine psychology: the boundless capacity of a woman's love.

We can now consider an example of Our Lord's actual preaching. If one were to ask what was the most appealing sermon ever preached most people perhaps might refer to the sermon of "The Prodigal Son." Even for

its literary quality alone, it has been called the most perfect short-story ever written. Almost the whole world knows at least this one sermon of Christ.

The sermon begins with a common, deeply shared human experience: the conflicting feelings of a father who loves his son and yet who wants his son to be free. Intrinsically bound up with the father's love is his deep sense of a young man's right and need to be free. This is the first thing that catches us, the psychological conflict of a loving father who nonetheless does not want to dominate or control his son. So when the son insists on his freedom, in loving kindness the father sadly agrees. The son is given his share of his inheritance, not only because the father loves him but because the father also knows that love is free, that it cannot be forced. The son must be allowed to be free. In just a few sentences, the whole basic condition of the human race—its freedom, its need to love and the interrelation of freedom and love—is revealed.

The second deep human experience our Lord touches in this masterly parable is that of loneliness. This comes after one has spent all one's goods and wasted oneself. Here we relive in ourselves this feeling. We feel that same sense of having wasted something and wasted it terribly. We too wanted to be free and on our own to do what we pleased. But we too came finally at some turn in the road, to discover that we had been wrong, and perhaps even horribly foolish, and we are now caught in our own guilt and regrets. There is now only a sense of loss, of waste and a gnawing sense of guilt.

We are growing increasingly to understand in counseling and psychotherapy, the way guilt digs into a person's soul, often making him tragically, miserably unhappy. But all of us know guilt and we all know this same sense of having wasted something selfishly. So here too we are caught up in this shared feeling and we wander with this boy. We can walk with him because we know how he feels.

We also can understand his fears about returning home. From a logical point of view he has no right to go home because, in a way, he deserves only his father's rejection and hostility. He has no right to anything but to hear, "I told you so. You were determined to make a fool of yourself and that is the end of it. I will have nothing more to do with you." From a certain point of view we can see that this could be. The other son has the right to everything. He was loyal and faithful. So we share the fear and anxiety of the guilty one. We know this anxiety; we know it even some nights when perhaps we wake up in the middle of the night and these anxieties strike us; when our own guilts and fears come forward.

So we know this young man in his innermost feelings. We know what it means to be alone, to feel guilty; anxious, distraught and fearful; even what it means to have no one. Now that he has spent his wealth all the shallow, superficial, good-time friends of the past are gone. He is alone, alone with his misery, his sorrow, but most of all alone with his fear.

We all know, finally, the last profound human qualities that are touched in the parable: love and forgiveness. One of the most difficult problems for every sinner is not only his sin or his guilt—it is the problem of forgiving himself and being willing to return to Christ. The subtle difference between Judas and Peter seems to bear this out. Peter, in a sense, was more cowardly than Judas and Peter's betrayal was in some ways as grave as that of Judas. Judas at least did something that had an element of manliness in it. He openly betrayed Christ. He betrayed Him for money, which money he later had the courage to throw back. But Peter, who boasted of his courage, became a cowardly figure in a courtyard afraid of a servant girl. Peter's sin because of this very display of unmanly weakness would have been perhaps the more difficult one for him to forgive himself. Yet the core of the comparison of these two pivotal characters, as we see them in the Gospel, is not only their sin but what they did with their guilt. Peter was somehow able first to forgive himself for the cheap and shabby cowardice that he had displayed before a little servant girl. He was then able to come back and face Christ again. He looked in Christ's eyes and in that look he received forgiveness. The tragedy of Judas was apparently that he was so guilty he could do nothing but attack himself. He could act out his changed view in a very dramatic way. He could throw those coins at the feet of the men who had aided the betrayal of Christ and disavow what he had done. But he could not return and face Our Lord. On the contrary, in self-hatred, apparently, he hanged himself. Here we are reminded of St. Thomas' illuminating observation that the sinner does not truly love himself but in fact, in his sin, hates and does evil to himself. In counseling and psychotherapeutic interviews, one sees many people in a similar psychological struggle not only because of the sin they committed but because they cannot forgive themselves. In pride and self-attack it is extremely difficult for them to turn and face the forgiving eyes of Christ.

This is the struggle of this young man in Our Lord's sermon before he can start back home. We can imagine him violently attacking himself for his stupidity, his pride, his vanity, his selfishness, his inconsideration—like a person who attacks himself in a counseling interview. All these things the young man can say about himself because he knows himself better than

anyone else and he is the best observer of everything he does. So there he is, standing in severe judgment of himself. The struggle, as he turns to walk the long, long way home, is: can he forgive himself? Can he, who deserves only rejection, take a chance at throwing himself on his father's mercy? He finally resolves this agonizing dilemma by a very simple solution. People in violent psychological states of guilt and anxiety often seek such simple solutions. The simple solution for this young man was that his father would hire servants and did from time to time. Many times he had seen men wander in, profligates of various sorts, and his father had been kind to them, had clothed them and fed them. So he said to himself, "I am no different now than any of those weak or drunken, disordered, inadequate men that I have seen come and go in my childhood. I will present myself that way at the servants' door and I will beg to be taken in just as they did." It is in this human condition of complete degradation, of having "hit bottom" as the Alcoholics Anonymous describes it, that he is able to think of forgiving himself. He finds one condition not lower than his own and this one condition is his pathway back to his father.

All this time, you recall, the father had been going night after night up a hill to watch for him in loving concern and anxiety. The father from afar thus sees him coming and is overcome by joy. You all know and share the human condition of being forgiven and of coming home. This is the final sensitively delicate touch in Our Lord's parable. By contrast to the anxiety and the fear of being unwilling to forgive ourselves for a horrible act against someone who loves us and whom we love, there is—when one is able to forgive oneself enough at least just to return—the indescribably overwhelming relief of love and forgiveness. All of us know this and have in some way experienced it. We know that mercy, as Shakespeare says, "is twice blessed," that it blesses him who gives and him who receives. So the father in mercy and love is blessed and the son in receiving mercy and love is blessed. The conclusion of Our Lord's sermon: through this beautiful father-image we can begin to understand something of the profundity of Divine Love.

13 But how do we apply this concept of sharing the human condition of our hearers so profoundly illustrated in "The Prodigal Son" to our own sermons. Fundamentally we want to arrive at the hearer's own identification and involvement with what he hears. This is the way we feel as Our Lord is giving his sermon. We are, as the French say, "engagé"—that is, committed and intensely sharing.

In sharing the human condition then, we do not mean any extremely emotional or revivalist quality—this would be something else and could

have quite a different purpose. What we mean—and what we find effective in counseling and psychotherapy—could be somewhat described by words like “warmth,” “commitment” or “belonging.” We rather suggest to our sermon audience some deeply human theme and allow each one’s own introspection to develop his uniquely personal variations and details. The analogy of a symphonic theme with its many different variations for each instrument, might be helpful here. Once this personal identification and involvement has been achieved in each hearer, the speaker can enlarge on the theological points implied. These will then have personal meaning and application for each hearer. They will not remain simply impersonal and be only general information. Having assimilated and made personal the basic human theme, each hearer is now—like the hearers of Our Lord’s sermon—taking counsel with himself and his own human condition.

As we see, this warmth and sense of sharing is communicated primarily in the material of the sermon. The speaker’s manner will vary with the accustomed style and personality of each speaker. This kind of material however, would, it seems, tend to favor a somewhat calm and conversational tone. The speaker depends on the speaking system to carry his words into the ear of each hearer. The speaker avoids those mannerisms that would perhaps take the hearer away from his own self-involved pondering on what the speaker is saying. For the purpose we have in mind, the hearer is rather talking to himself, counseling himself even, through the voice of the speaker. The speaker therefore strives rather to lead and direct this deep personal meditation more than to attract attention to himself. His appeal, in so far as it is emotional, has a more suppressed and therefore intense quality in comparison with a more directly dramatic expression. It is more like the warm tone of deep sharing and understanding in the voice of a sensitive counselor.

Applying all this to our own audience now and our own sermons, let us look again at this idea of wandering away from home, of loneliness, of being lost, so poignantly suggested in “The Prodigal Son.” Most little children have been lost. I was lost one time when I was three or four. It was my own fault, too. I wandered off in disobedience and was terribly lost, and I had that same fear of going back home. I expected to be rather badly spanked because I knew I had deliberately disobeyed. This ought to touch something in you, too. You must have been lost sometime. You must have been terribly afraid when you were lost. Now if so, we have touched on a common sharing of our uniqueness. You know what it is to be afraid to go home and so do I. This would again be the kind of common human touch that is in “The Prodigal Son.”

I can think of adults who have felt lost and alone. I recall one time being terribly lonely in a foreign country and I suspect this too will touch you somewhere. You too must know the loneliness of being in a strange land, or a strange city. This feeling is particularly poignant if people are speaking a foreign tongue. This adds to the ostracized feeling. This kind of loneliness can be really devastating sometimes. There is a real truth in the fact of being homesick. It is a terrible sickness. It is like being seasick. You cannot believe after it is over that you were as sick as you were. But literally one can almost want to die of homesickness just as one can nearly want to die of seasickness even though both may pass in a comparatively short time and, in a sense, there is nothing physically wrong with us in either sickness. Yet loneliness can be a terrible suffering. Well, I should have touched on something here that you can share. All of us at one time or another must have known some kind of homesickness or loneliness. If so we know how the prodigal son felt. We know, too, how he longed to be back home. We know how strange he felt in a foreign land or unknown city and how little he belonged there, how little any of it was part of himself. This we can all share.

We share deeply, too, the sense of coming home. Perhaps even the great appeal of Christmas to the world at this time each year owes something to this strong human feeling of wanting to be home. Not even the Russians with all their skill in Pavlovian conditioning will perhaps be able to condition out of the human heart this Christmas sense of coming home, of returning to God. There is something about the light and warmth around the holy crib shining in the darkness that tells us we are nearing home—nearing the place where we will always belong. It is not unlike the prodigal son's beginning to see lights in the familiar houses of his own village. He knows he is near his father and his family and all those who love him. He belongs again. Christmas somehow seems to lead us all back to some similar kind of belonging, to a sense of coming home to God. If, at no other time, at least at Christmas the world seems permeated with this tone and mood of a return to the God Who loves and forgives us.

All of us then, like the prodigal son, have wandered off, and all of us have returned home and experienced great joy and peace in being there. We know, too, what it means to come home and be forgiven for something. Few human experiences are as intense as to have carried around anxiety and guilt for a long, long time and then to discover that it was nothing, that all we had to do was to return home and face the issue and it all disappeared. To the relief of forgiveness is added the indescribable joy of an atmosphere that is suffused with mercy, kindness and understanding; all

those tones that St. Paul lists as the qualities of charity.

This discussion of the prodigal son and its implications for ourselves should, at some point, have gone beyond what I said. It should have enabled you to begin to think of your own lives in varying ways and to tie up in the uniqueness of your own experience the meaning of what I have said. The psychology of the sermon of "The Prodigal Son," if one might use that term, is to lead us from the human love of a father which we can feel and understand and share, to the plenitude of Divine Love infinitely beyond us. As St. John tells us, how can we love God whom we see not if we love not our neighbor whom we see. Now if we cannot share love in the human condition, we will never understand it in the Divine condition. Our Lord, Who took upon Himself all the things of our human nature save sin, gives us therefore this striking parallel of human love at its deepest and most delicate so we could use this as a scaffolding or ladder to God. Through it we can, in a sense, catapult ourselves to some understanding of the mystery of Divine Love. Aristotle in describing God says, "God is what man is at his very best and that infinitely more." This is exactly what Our Lord told us so well: when we understand a forgiving and loving father, we understand something of God's love and forgiveness, but that, infinitely more.

An English essayist has said:

Primitive and essential things have great power to touch the heart of the beholder. I mean such things as a man ploughing a field, or sowing or reaping; a girl filling a pitcher from a spring; a young mother with her child; a fisherman mending his nets; a light from a lonely hut on a dark night . . .⁴

As we have seen, the New Testament gives us many illustrations of this. The above quotation has certainly this in mind. In the Old Testament, the Psalms which we meet each day in the Breviary, are filled with this same kind of sermon material. Think of the delicate meaning in God's love covering us like a bird covers a nest with its wings or like the "pupillum oculi." Deep basic protective mechanisms in animals and man are implied here that could be unfolded with both empathy and sympathy. We would, for example, quickly go blind, if we did not have this autonomic reflex to protect our eyes. Or again, the miserable frustration and helplessness that is suggested in the sinner being lost in a mire—and the sudden surge of hope and confidence when we can stand solidly or spring forward on the rock that is God. All of us have been "stuck in the mud" literally and

4. Behrman, S. N., Max Beerbohm—quoted in: *Portrait of Max*, New York (Random House, 1960).

spiritually and we know this frustrating feeling very well, indeed. We know, too, the freeing joy of Grace.

If we could think of one model that we would all like to resemble particularly in giving sermons, it would be that of Solomon. In the light of this, it is interesting to take a look again at the Book of Kings and notice what it was that Solomon prayed for. You recall that he had a dream and in that dream God asked him what he wished. He did not, contrary to what popularly might be thought, pray for great wisdom. What he prayed for was an "understanding heart." God was so pleased at his prayer, however, that He gave him not only an "understanding heart" but all the great expanse of knowledge that is now known as the wisdom of Solomon. But Solomon prayed only for deep, human understanding.

What do we mean by an "understanding heart"? The people know. They know and convey the meaning of this in a somewhat strange use of the word "understanding." They will say of you, in great praise, that you are a very "understanding" man. Now what do they mean? They certainly do not mean that you understand English or some foreign language in which they may be speaking. That is to say, they are not trying to communicate anything that has to do with linguistics or even logic. They do not mean that you understood the grammatical constructions of their sentences. This is presumed. What they mean by you being a very understanding man is apparently what Solomon prayed for.

Alternately a person may say of someone, "He didn't understand me at all. He is a brilliant man and he gives wonderful, intellectual sermons but he just doesn't seem to understand. He certainly doesn't understand *me*." Here again we have, in a negative form, this peculiar twist to the meaning of the word "understanding." Here it means, "He does not share my human condition." The person might go on to say, "He hasn't any heart, he's all mind. He's brilliant but he doesn't feel the way you feel. He doesn't understand what it means to be in the condition that I'm in." He might even say, "He hasn't any sympathy for my weakness. He just doesn't seem to understand."

In psychological research, it is becoming increasingly evident that unless one communicates some kind of "understanding heart," one does not seem effective in helping people change. It seems to me that this must also be true of any kind of preaching, teaching or exposition. No matter how brilliant our presentation, unless our communication is suffused with something of the quality of Pauline charity, it does not seem to convey to another this sense of a deeply "understanding heart." But if we can take as a model this master sermon, "The Prodigal Son," we can begin our

Bernard

1/ own sermons with a sharing of the human condition of our hearers. We
will attempt to reach down inside our hearers, so to speak, and try to tap
2/ in them some human quality of love, joy, gladness, sorrow, weakness—
some element which we share together. From that core element, we try to
3/ bring out, as our Lord does so perfectly in “The Prodigal Son,” the theo-
logical structure we wish to teach. But we anchor it deeply in their hearts
and in our own, rather than keeping it coldly or impersonally intellectual.
In other words we suffuse our sermons with that charity which St. Paul
so well describes. If we do this—in addition to the indispensable qualities
of theological knowledge and depth which our sermons must have—we will
convey something of the profound wisdom of Solomon’s prayer. The people
then really can feel—“Here is a man with an ‘understanding heart.’ ”

REV. CHARLES A. CURRAN, Ph.D.
Professor of Psychology
Loyola University

Resolutions Committee

December 30, 1960

Third Convention of the Catholic Homiletic Society

The committee proposes that the convention express its gratitude to:

1. Our host, His Eminence Albert Cardinal Meyer, D.D., and to our keynote speaker, His Excellency William E. Cousins, D.D., for their interest and encouragement;
2. The President of the Extension Society, His Excellency Archbishop William O'Brien, for the use of altars and other Mass equipment;
3. The SVD seminarians for their help with arrangements and the Quigley seminarians for serving the Masses.

The committee proposes, also, that the convention resolve to:

1. Foster local meetings;
2. Encourage newsletter articles of a broader appeal;
3. Approach Father Edmund Benard, Dean of the School of Theology, and Father Gilbert Hartke, O.P., Dean of the School of Speech, at the Catholic University of America, to set up a degree course in homiletics.
4. Encourage members, as members, to submit articles on homiletics to clerical magazines.

Chairman, REV. GILBERT ZLATAR, O.F.M.

REV. JOSEPH O'NEILL

REV. FIDELIS GOODMAN, M.M.

Necrology

The following members of the Society have passed to their eternal reward during the last year:

THE VERY REV. DR. EDMOND BENARD, of the Catholic University, Washington, D.C., Dean of the School of Sacred Theology, died on February 4, 1961. Father Benard had served on the Faculty since 1943. Widely known as a speaker on radio and television, having given many series on The Catholic Hour, he was likewise renowned as a retreat master. To us he was best known as one of the most ardent of the Founding Fathers, our greatest adviser and kindest counsellor. In the funeral oration, Father Eugene Burke, C.S.P., said, "His many series of sermons, broadcast nationally, remain in print to testify to the fact, along with his innumerable hearers, that he was one of the great preachers of this generation. . . . Underlying our grief there remains a note of Christian joy that knows that a priest and a priestly life are God's gift to all of us, and that out of the memories of his dedicated priesthood which Father Benard left us, we can echo for ourselves the words of one of the most Catholic of modern poets: "Spirit, thou wert fine clay."

THE REV. VICTOR MILLS, O.F.M., another Charter member, died on January 15, 1961. The forty years of his priestly life had been devoted to teaching, preaching and writing. He excelled in all fields. In November, 1960, Father Mills was honored by the Franciscan Order with the title of "Lector Jubilatus," the highest honor given to a scholar of the Order. During most of his teaching years he taught Homiletics.

GOD REST THEIR GENEROUS AND ELOQUENT SOULS!

